

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 267536

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

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LIMDIS

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM DACCA DATED NOVEMBER 10, 1975
SENT SECSTATE WASHDC INFO BANGKOK, CALCUTTA, COLOMBO,
ISLAMABAD, KABUL, KATHMANDU, MOSCOW, NEW DELHI, RANGOON, PEKING,
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S E C R E T DACCA 5470

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, BG, IN

SUBJ: LAST WEEK IN BANGLADESH IN RETROSPECT

1. IT MAY BE USEFUL TO OFFER A CAPSULE SUMMARY OF THE
CHAOTIC EVENTS OF LAST WEEK IN BANGLADESH WHICH SAW THREE
DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS, MUCH KILLING, AND THE AVOIDANCE OF
CIVIL WAR, WITH ATTENDANT POSSIBILITY OF INDIAN INTER-
VENTION, BY THE NARROWEST OF MARGINS. THIS ACCOUNT IS
BASED ON THE BEST INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY
FROM ALL SOURCES.

2. THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN BRIGADIER MOSHARRAF, CHIEF

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 267536

OF THE ARMY GENERAL

STAFF, WHO HAD BEEN EMBITTERED BY HIS FAILURE TO SHARE IN THE PROMOTIONS RECEIVED BY SOME OF HIS COLLEAGUES AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT MUJIB BY THE MAJORS ON AUGUST 15 AND WHO WAS ALSO BELIEVED TO BE ON A LIST OF ARMY OFFICERS TO BE INVESTIGATED WHICH HAD RECENTLY BEEN DRAWN UP BY THE MAJORS, BEGAN IN THE EARLY HOURS OF MONDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 3. WE DO NOT KNOW POSITIVELY WHETHER MOSHARAFF WAS THE ARCHITECT OF THE CONFRONTATION, AS MANY CONTEND, OR WHETHER, AS ONE GOOD SOURCE HAS TOLD TOLD US, HE SIMPLY WENT ALONG WITH SUBORDINATES WHO WERE DETERMINED TO END THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE MAJORS IN THE MOSHTAQUE GOVERNMENT, A ROLE WHICH HAD RESULTED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IN THE HARRASSMENT OF SOME OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS. THIS SOURCE ALSO HELD THAT ONE OF MOSHARRAF'S OBJECTIVES--ALTHOUGH HE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY MINDFUL OF THE PERSONAL GLORY THAT MIGHT AWAIT HIM--WAS TO TAKE CONTROL OF HIS SUBORDINATES' PLANS IN SUCH A WAY AS TO AVOID MAJOR BLOODSHED.

3. MOSHARRAF AND HIS ALLIES QUICKLY TOOK CONTROL EARLY MONDAY MORNING OF THE ARMY CANTONMENT AS WELL AS MOST OF THE CITY OF DACCA AND PRESSED THEIR CONFGONTATION WITH THE MOSHTAQQE GOVERNMENT BY FLYING A MIG FIGHTER AND ARMED HELICOPTER OVER THE CITY IN A SHOW OF STRENGTH WHICH WAS ALSO INTENDED TO INTIMIDATE THE TANK CREWS LOYAL TO THE GOVERNMENT. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, MOSHARRAF LEVIED FOUR DEMANDS ON MOSHTAQUE: 1) THAT MOSHARRAF REPLACE MAJOR GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN, HIS PERSONAL RIVAL, AS CHIEF OF STAFF; 2) THAT THE MAJORS BE RETURNED TO REGULAR ARMY DISCIPLINE; 3) THAT THE TANK FROCES LOYAL TO THE GOVERNMENT BE DISARMED; AND 4) THAT MOSHTAQUE REMAIN IN OFFICE. OUTGUNNED AND APPARENTLY INTEND ABOVE ALL ON AVOIDING BLOODSHED, WHICH WOULD ALSO HAVE INVITED INDIAN INTERVENTION, MOSHTAQUE EVENTUALLY YIELDED AFTER NEGOTIATING DURING THE COURSE OF A LONG DAY A COMPROMISE WITH MOSHARRAF BY WHICH THE MAJORS AND SOME OF THEIR COLLEAGUES, TO WHOM MOSHTAQUE WAS INDEBTED FOR HIS PRESIDENCY, WERE PERMITTED TO DEPART BANGLADESH. BEFORE THIS COMPROMISE HAD BEEN REACHED, THE MOSHTAQUE GOVERNMENT HAD CALLED ON THE ARMY FORCES AT COMILLA TO COME TO ITS AID BUT HAD BEEN REFUSED ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE COMILLA COMMANDER WOULD ONLY RESPOND

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 267536

TO THE ORDERS OF THE CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF (WHO WAS THEN UNDER ARREST) OR THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (I.E., MOSHARRAF).

4. THE CONFRONTATION BROUGHT ANOTHER BLOODY RESULT WHICH, WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE, HAD BEEN PART OF AN EARLIER CONTINGENCY PLAN TO BE CARRIED OUT IN THE EVENT THAT MOSHTAQUE WERE TO BE KILLED, I.E., THE MURDER OF HIS FORMER COLLEAGUES IN THE AWAMI PARTY LEADERSHIP WHO WERE NOW HIS

POLITICAL ENEMIES--FORMER PRIME MINISTER MANSOOR ALI, FORMER VICE PRESIDENT SYED NAZRUL ISLAM, FORMER PRIME MINISTER, FINANCE MINISTER AND INDIOPHILE TAJUDDIN AHMED, AND FORMER INDUSTRIES MINISTER KAMARUZZAMAN. THESE LEADERS WERE KILLED, EVIDENTLY AT THE ORDER OF ONE OR MORE OF THE MAJORS, EARLY MONDAY MORNING AT DACCA JAIL; THE EVENT ADDED A NOTE OF MYSTERY TO MOSHARRAF'S ACQUIESCENCE LATER IN THE DAY TO THE DEPARTURE OF THE MAJORS, ONE VERSION HAVING IT THAT MOSHARRAF DID NOT YET KNOW OF THE DEED WHEN THE PLANE LEFT DACCA AT MIDNIGHT MONDAY. MANY OBSERVERS ALSO NOTED THAT ONE EFFECT OF THE MURDERS WAS TO REMOVE THE LOGICAL LEADERSHIP OF ANY PRO-INDIAN GOVERNMENT.

5. WITH THE EXPLOSIVE SITUATION DEFUSED TO A DEGREE BY THE DEPARTURE OF THE MAJORS, NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN MOSHTAQUE AND MOSHARRAF CONTINUED ON TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY, RESULTING IN MOSHARRAF'S DESIGNATION AS CHIEF OF STAFF LATE TUESDAY NIGHT, AND EVENTUALLY IN MOSHTAQUE'S RESIGNATION EARLY THURSDAY MORNING WITH THE SIMULTANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT A NON-POLITICAL FIGURE, CHIEF JUSTICE A.S.M. SAYEM, WOULD BE APPOINTED PRESIDENT. SAYEM WAS SWORN IN ON THURSDAY AND PROMPTLY DISSOLVED THE PARLIAMENT. REPORTS, WHICH WE ACCEPT, WERE RIFE THAT THE CABINET HAD ALREADY RESIGNED IN PROTEST AGAINST THE MURDER OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENT LEADERS.

6. BUT IT NOW BECAME CLEAR THAT MOSHARRAF'S ASSUMPTION OF POWER IN THE ARMY WAS UNPALATABLE TO MOST OF HIS FELLOW OFFICERS AND ENLISTED RANKS, BOTH BECAUSE GENERAL ZIA EVIDENTLY HELD A MUCH WIDER POPULAR FOLLOWING AMONG THEM BUT ALSO, AND VERY IMPORTANTLY, BECAUSE MOSHARRAF WAS WIDELY SEEN, WHETHER ACCURATELY OR NOT, AS AN INSTRUMENT OF
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 267536

INDIAN POLICY. THIS PERCEPTION WAS BUTTRESSED BY THE PRO-MUJIB PROCESSION ON TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY'S HARTAL TO PROTEST THE KILLINGS AT DACCA JAIL. THE LOWER RANKS REVOLTED IN THE EARLY HOURS OF FRIDAY MORNING, QUICKLY OVERTHROWING THE MOSHARRAF FORCES AND, ACCORDING TO VIRTUALLY ALL ACCOUNTS, KILLING MOSHARRAF. EXTENSIVE FIRING WENT THROUGHOUT THE CITY ALL NIGHT AND ALL DURING THE DAY FRIDAY, MOST OF IT CELEBRATORY AFTER MOSHARRAF WAS OUSTED. ONE AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT ONLY ABOUT THIRTY WERE KILLED IN THE OVERTHROW; OTHER REPORTS HAVE REACHED US WHICH PUT THE FIGURE IN THE HUNDREDS.

7. THE SUCCESSFUL REVOLT OF THE LOWER RANKS NOW BROUGHT A NEW PROBLEM, THE RAMPANT INDISCIPLINE OF THE ENLISTED MEN, MANY OF WHOM NOW TURNED ON OFFICERS AGAINST WHOM THEY MIGHT

HAVE GRUDGES END OTHERS BEGAN PRESENTING DEMANDS ON THE ARMY LEADERSHIP FOR A BETTER DEAL IN THEIR FUTURE TREATMENT. WIDESPREAD REPORTS WERE CURRENT THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF MILITARY OFFICERS HAD FLED OR WERE AT LEAST STAYING AWAY FROM THE CANTONMENT OUT OF FEAR OF THE RAMPAGING SEPOYS, AND SEVERAL REPORTY REACHED US OF THE MURDER OF MILITARY OFFICEGS AND OF THEIR WIVES.

8. MEANWHILE THE POST-MOSHARRAF GOVERNMENT TOOK SHAPE IN A MEETING EARLY FRIDAY MORNING BETWEEN GENERAL ZIA, MOSHTAQUE AND PRESUMABLY OTHER PRINCIPAL AIDES. MOSHTAQUE WAS OFFERED THE PRESIDENCY ANEW BUT DECLINED ON THE GROUND THAT, IN THE STILL EXPLOSIVE SITUATION, THE COUNTRY REQUIRED A NON-POLITICAL, NON-CONTROVERSIAL PRESIDENT. CONSEQUENTLY THE DECISION WAS REACHED TO KEEP JUSTICE SAYEM IN THE PRESIDENCY AND TO TURN OVER TO HIM AS WELL THE FUNCTIONS OF CHIEF OF THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION, A ROLE WHICH HAD BEEN FILLED BRIEFLY BY GENERAL ZIA. WE WERE POINTEDLY ASSURED THAT THESE ARRANGEMENTS ENJOYED FULL SUPPORT BOTH WITHIN THE MILITARY AND WITHIN THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP SO THAT THE WAY WAS NOW CLEAR FOR THE RESTORATION OF STABILITY IN THE COUNTRY.

9. AS OF MONDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 10, THE SITUATION HAD RETURNED TO AN APPARENT NORMALCY, WITH INTERNATIONAL AIR SERVICE RESUMED ON SUNDAY, BUT THE GENERAL UNEASINESS WAS
SECRET

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PAGE 05 STATE 267536

STILL BEING FED BY REPORTS OF CONTINUED KILLINGS AMONG THE MILITARY AND OF POSSIBLE INDIAN ACTIONS ALONG THE BORDER. THE PROSPECT WAS FOR, AT BEST, A CONTINUED STATE OF TENSION AND UNCERTIANTY.

10. COMMENT. THREE CONCLUSIONS IMPLICIT IN THE ABOVE ACCOUNT SHOULD BE UNDERLINE. THE FIRST IS THAT THE ACTIONS OF THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS IN THE COUP AND COUNTER-COUP APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN NON-POLITICAL, EXCEPT IN THE SENSE THAT MOSHARRAF HAD THE ADDITIONAL DISADVANTAGE OF APPEARING TO BE PRO-INDIAN. THE ARMY FORCES WHICH OVERTHREW MOSHTAQUE AND THE MAJORS APPEAR TO HAVE ACTED PRIMARILY OUT OF A SENSE OF GRIEVANCE AGAINST THE MAJORS. THE COUNTER-COUP WAS THE WORK OF LOWER RANKS WHO FAR PREFERRED ZIA TO MOSHARRAF AND WHO WERE ALSO CONCERNED WHRE MOSHARRAF'S LOYALTY MIGHT LIE. WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ANY OF THE REGIMES OF THE PAST WEEK WERE ANTI-AMERICAN, PRO-INDIAN, OR PRO-SOVIET IN CHARACTER.

11. THE SECOND IS THATWE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT INDIA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY OF THE WEEK'S ACTIONS.

12. THE THIRD IS THE CONFIRMATION OF HOW STRONGLY AND PERVASIVELY ANTI-INDIA ANTIPATHIES ARE FELT HERE-FROM THE TOP OF THE LEADERSHIP TO THE LOWEST GROUPS OF THE SOCIETY. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT MOSHARRAF WAS PRO-INDIAN, AND SOME THAT HE WAS NOT, HE WAS WIDELY IDENTIFIED AS SUCH AND THE WILD CELEBRATIONS HERE OF HIS OVERTHROW CARRIED DISTINCTLY ANTI-INDIAN OVERTONES. BOSTER UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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